

Mexican Drug Cartels
Significance and Potential Impact on the United States

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Abstract

The power struggle in present-day Mexico between major rival cartel groups and the Mexican government has evaded the appropriate amount of media and government concern. Traced through history, the modern drug cartels that powerfully control regions of Mexico have their origins in the early twentieth century during Prohibition. This drug activity is detrimental to Mexico, and it should be worrisome to the U.S. The threat of violence and political anarchy spilling over from Mexico is a very real threat, and the United States should aid Mexico and lightly intervene where necessary. An analysis of different offered solutions is necessary, leading to a blended plan that would be most effective.

Mexican Drug Cartels: Significance and Potential Impact on the United States

Introduction

On November 24, 2011, the city of Guadalajara, Mexico awoke to find twenty-three bodies left in three public locations within the city (“Segunda Matanza,” 2012). Attached to the bodies was a “narcomanta,” a signed note in which the cartel group Los Zetas claimed credit for the kills and subsequent disposal. The clear message was two-fold. First, the citizens of Guadalajara should fear Los Zetas. Second, the Sinaloa Cartel, traditionally the drug cartel in control over Jalisco (the state in which Guadalajara is located), should beware of advancing rivals.

This violence is not rare in modern-day Mexico, nor is it excessive by Los Zetas standards, as will be shown (Finnegan, 2012). Groups like Los Zetas have made their climb to power on the business of drug trafficking, a thriving business in Mexico; today they hold great power in the territories to which they lay claim (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 32). The Mexican drug problem, and its ensuing, horrendous violence, eludes U.S. attention for the most part while it stays localized in Mexico.

This thesis will explain the history of Mexican drug cartels, including their inceptions and progressive growth. Today, these cartels, particular the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas, are strong political forces in Mexico that pose a threat to Mexican national stability (Kurtzman, 2009). Following sections will outline the diplomatic relationship between Mexico and the United States and why Mexico’s problems may soon be the problems of the U.S. Because of this, the U.S. ought to focus its attention more on the activities and influence of Mexican drug cartels, and implement a successful plan to bring change to the culture of violence, fear, and drugs tragically prevalent in today’s Mexico.

History

Modern-day Mexico has a vibrant drug industry that specializes in transportation through the nation and to the United States (Recio, 2002, p.38). The history of Mexico's drug industry begins in the early twentieth century, as will be discussed. From its origins, the industry has grown into the present day trade activities of the major Mexican drug cartels. Also, it is important to analyze the political climate of Mexico within which the drug trade was conceived and has grown.

Use of drugs has, of course, been a habit of United States and Mexican peoples since before the early twentieth century (Móró, Simon, Bárd, & Rácz, 2011), but the events that incited and formed the dynamics of drug transportation, use, and cultivation observable today between the United States and Mexico can be traced to this early part of the twentieth century (Recio, 2002). In the United States, growing interest and concern in the ubiquitous availability of cocaine and heroin led to the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act (Recio, 2002, p. 24). According to Gootenberg, this U.S. stance grew out of "an early panic about popular drug use and pharmaceutical firm abuses" (2012). This was the first piece of U.S. legislation directly addressing drug use; it mandated that manufacturers label warnings if their products contained narcotics in the formula (Recio, 2002, p. 24). According to Gabriela Recio, the passage of this act primarily concerned lobbying from the pharmacy industry (2002, p. 24). In 1914, the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act, the first step towards *regulation* of drugs, mandated that pharmacies prescribing opiates be federally registered and that a special tax be imposed on all drug sales. The Harrison Act allowed for wide interpretation in enforcement that led to many pharmacists and their clients being arrested for sales of drugs (Recio, 2002, p. 26). This legislation is what

began federal enforcement and castigation for violations of drug use. Recio argues that in the earlier days of the Act, physicians and their clients were punished more, but that eventually drug dealers and users became the focus of federal investigations (2002). Although not directly related to drugs, the National Prohibition Act of 1920 (referred to as the “Volstead Act” from now on within this article), which started Prohibition in the United States, was the last influential piece of legislation from the early twentieth century that formed the background of the modern-day Mexican illegal drug industry.

The cumulative effect of the Harrison and Volstead Acts in Mexico was to create a substantial black market opportunity left by the void in legal acquisition of drugs and alcohol by United States citizens in need of such products (Recio, 2002, p. 27). Mexico was able to supply these demands for several reasons. First, Mexican legislation prohibiting drug and alcohol consumption came later than U.S. laws. Thus, for a period of time, Mexico could legally produce opium, marijuana, and alcohol, and only the transportation to United States citizens was illegal. Second, Mexican laws were less forcefully enforced than their United States counterparts. This phenomenon stems from the corruption and lack of enforcing power that characteristically cripple the Mexican government.¹ Third, the amount of money to be made from drug or alcohol sales to the U.S. was large enough to be nearly irresistible for certain Mexican officials, for example Esteban Cantú, the governor of Baja California (Recio, 2002, p. 34). The sale of alcohol also produced substantial tax revenue for each Mexican state, such that prohibiting the consumption of alcohol would fiscally harm the state. Recio explains, “laws prohibiting the production and sale of different liquors ... were often disregarded by officials due to their negative impact on fiscal revenues” (2002, p. 30). Campos writes “rhetoric and

¹ A further discussion of corruption in the Mexican government will occur later in this article.

fiscal reality were very much in conflict during these years when it came to alcohol restrictions” (2010, p. 388). Lastly, a main difference between the United States and Mexico was the source of support for prohibitionist legislation. Recio argues that in the United States, support originated from public interest groups, whereas in Mexico the support originated in the federal government and was pushed downward (2002). Thus, support of the legislation was less universal. Nevertheless, because Mexican legislation in letter banned drugs and alcohol, organizations could not merely manufacture these products openly.

The demand that the United States generated for drugs and alcohol created several organizations in Mexico which sought to appease that demand. Naturally, most of these groups were based in the northern Mexican states nearest the border for convenience of proximity and ease of transportation. Sinaloa, Baja California, Sonora, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua were the states most active in the illicit trade into the United States (Recio, 2002, p. 36). When Prohibition began, these states first supplied alcohol, as the demand was higher, and thus profits were richer. Robert Joe Stout writes, “large amounts of liquor were harder to conceal than *adormidera* or marijuana, making it necessary for exporters to bribe—or form partnerships—with those in charge of customs” (2012, p. 34). The networks of partnerships and briberies formed by these organizations became the foundations of networks with the capability to transport any product into the United States (Stout, 2012). These organizations adapted into their roles as traffickers and learned methods for evading prosecution. An organization would constantly change the roles of different cities in the organization’s network and all organizations wisely pursued technological innovation as a furtherance of transportation effectiveness (Recio, 2002, p.

40-41). When Prohibition ended in the United States in 1933, these organizations did not falter but rather moved to a full emphasis on the lucrative drug trade to supply, once again, U.S. demand (Stout, 2012). At that point, these organizations were fully networked traffickers with full means of moving drugs into the United States, with the power to bribe or coerce their means. This marked the evolution from smugglers of sundry illicit substances including alcohol to today's drug cartels that specialized. The two main groups to emerge that remain active today are the Cartel de Sinaloa from the state of Sinaloa and the Cartel del Golfo from the state of Tamaulipas.

Emerging from a tumultuous past, the two main drug cartels active today are the "Cartel de Sinaloa" or Sinaloa Cartel and the "Cartel del Golfo" or Gulf Cartel (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 31). The Sinaloa Cartel dominates the northwestern area of Mexico through the states of Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, and even Jalisco (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). Tomas Kellner and Francesco Pipitone go so far as to argue that the Sinaloa Cartel runs drugs through cities as far east as Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo (2010, p. 31). Their leader is Joaquín Guzmán (aka "El Chapo"). According to Kellner and Pipitone, Guzmán is Mexico's most wanted man and *Forbes* estimates his wealth at \$1 billion (2010). The Sinaloa Cartel is a fairly organized cartel with different individuals known as "chapos" controlling different territories—all of whom report to Guzmán as central command (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). On the other hand, the Gulf Cartel is less organized. The 80s and 90s were a turbulent time for politics in the cartel, and no real leadership arose after Juan García-Ábrego was arrested in 1996. The Gulf Cartel is based in Tamaulipas and has always had control of that state (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 32). The organization of the cartel is less central than the Sinaloa Cartel, with different

factions often fighting for control of the whole. Until the rise of Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel did not seek expansion in a united, effective way. In fact, Los Zetas rose to such power that it now overwhelms the Gulf Cartel as the dominant force in northeastern Mexican drug trade.

Los Zetas was conceived as the militant enforcement arm of the Gulf Cartel (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 32). Los Zeta leaders were deserters from Mexican Special Forces, and many of them had been trained by the United States (Stout, 2012, p. 40). Naturally, the group was highly organized and disciplined to military levels. Los Zetas quickly became known for their brutality (Beith, 2012). The name “Los Zetas” (The Z’s) arose from the practice of carving the letter Z into the corpses of their victims (Finnegan, 2012). Disobedience of the leading members was not and is not to this day tolerated (Stout, 2012, p. 40). Intimidation and extracting financial payments from civilians within Zeta territory are two of the organization’s strongest weapons (Stout, 2012).

The brutality of Los Zetas has been the most successful factor in its growth as a cartel. Members of Los Zetas have engaged in beheading, tortures, kidnappings, extortions, and robberies (Stout, 2012). A popular tactic is to video the murder and then upload it to the Internet for the public to view or to leave headless or mutilated dead bodies in central locations of a city (“Segunda Matanza,” 2011). According to Malcolm Beith, Los Zetas is believed to be behind the seventy-two migrants found dead near Tamaulipas in August 2010 (2012, p. 30). Also, they are behind the mass grave of one hundred and ninety-three bodies found in Tamaulipas in 2011 (Finnegan, 2012). These instances are a limited glimpse at the tactics of Los Zetas used every time the Cartel infiltrates another town or territory.

Los Zetas is eager for expansion and has thus moved both west and south, as far as Chihuahua to the west and Jalisco to the southwest. William Finnegan surmises that Los Zetas desires a Pacific port to augment their business of moving product, whether that be drugs, humans, or other illicit substances (2012). Whenever Los Zetas take a city, the strategy is simple. Members infiltrate the city and immediately murder several people, preferably high-ranking public officials or owners of important businesses; then begins a long campaign of kidnappings that either demand large ransoms or merely end in murders (Beith, 2012, p. 30). The purpose is to establish control by fear of the citizens of the area. Local law enforcement is incapable in these situations because Los Zetas overwhelm via military strength or because enough members of local law enforcement are accepting bribes and do not interfere. In this way, Los Zetas comes to own a city or region. Extrapolating this strategy over several regions, Los Zetas now controls Ciudad Juárez and has put pressure in Jalisco, both traditionally territory of the Sinaloa Cartel (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010).

The expansion of Los Zetas has, quite naturally, intruded onto the territory of the Sinaloa Cartel and their business has negatively impacted the Sinaloa Cartel's profits (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 32). The result is an intense confrontation bordering on war between Los Zetas and the Sinaloa Cartel. As per Kellner and Pipitone, the war was incited in 2003 when the Sinaloa Cartel fought for control of Nuevo Laredo, the home of Los Zetas (2010, p. 32). Since then, the Los Zetas retaliation has been intense, with much violence on both sides. Arturo Beltrán Leyva, formerly an ally to the Sinaloa Cartel, deserted to Los Zetas (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). Beltrán Leyva was later arrested, and, assuming Guzmán to be responsible, Los Zetas responded by ordering the killing of

Guzmán's 22-year old son (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010). The cycle becomes continuous quickly. Every time Los Zetas advances on another city that the Sinaloa Cartel is invested in, intense fighting breaks out between the two cartels. There are casualties on both sides, but it is, truthfully, the neutral citizens that suffer the most as violence become commonplace and deaths become personal. The Zeta-Sinaloa confrontation has reached high proportions, with Mexican newspaper *Reforma* reporting "6,587 drug-related murders in 2009 in Mexico, up from 5,207 in 2008 and 2,275 in 2007" (as cited in Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 32-33). The Mexican government has become very involved in the political action commonly referred to as the "War on Drugs" in an effort to combat and reduce this drug-related violence.

The modern phase of Mexico's War on Drugs began forcefully soon after former President Felipe Calderón was elected in late 2006. Calderón, possibly in an effort to assert his power and establish legitimacy, began to use physical force via police and military action to fight the rampant drug trafficking activity that plagues his country (Finnegan, 2012). James Kitfield reports that in the following six years, 60,000 Mexicans have been murdered in the ensuing "cartel crackdown" (2012, p. 13). Calderón has sent thousands of soldiers into cities to fight cartel forces and maintain peace through a show of force. Also, he

has pursued a "kingpin strategy," like the "deck of cards" that the United States used in post-Saddam Iraq. In 2009, Mexican authorities listed the thirty-seven drug capos they most wanted. They have so far caught or killed twenty-two, and some cartels seem to have withered after losing their leaders. (Finnegan, 2012)

The most recent campaign has been a publicized effort to capture Guzmán (Finnegan, 2012). As of December 2012, the war stretched six long years, with many casualties that involved not only cartel members and soldiers but also civilians not directly involved in the conflict (Kitfield, 2012). Based only upon the resilient presence and growth of drug cartel activity, it would seem that this War on Drugs begun in force by Calderón has been ineffective, or at least less effective than hoped. Perhaps one of the most significant setbacks to an effective strategy is the corruption of Mexican government officials.

Although not a direct cause of modern drug trade in Mexico, corruption is one of the largest factors that permits the drug trade to remain so vibrant in Mexico. Money is a strong motivational tool in Mexico. The drug cartels have enough money from their prosperous business to bribe any person in the way of their agenda when violence is a less desired tactic for public appearances or the sake of discretion. Kellner and Pipitone report that

Fernando Rivera Hernández, deputy director of intelligence at the attorney general's organized crime unit, SIEDO, and the acting federal police chief, Gerardo Garay Cadena. Both were accused of ties to drug gangs. The attorney general's office charged that Rivera Hernández received large cash bribes from the Beltrán Leyva cartel in exchange for tipping them off about upcoming federal drug raids. (2010, p. 36)

Quite obviously, such inside information makes it hard for the federal government to be effective in decreasing drug activity in Mexico. Also, that drug cartels (in this case Los Zetas) can reach high-level government officials speaks to the pervasive nature of corruption from cartel monies. There are plenty of other examples of corruption high and

low in Mexican government. In December 2008, one of President Calderón's bodyguards was convicted of leaking intelligence to cartels for \$100,000 a month (Beith, 2012, p. 31). There are also plenty of low-level federal or state officials that are actively bribed to ensure smooth operation of drug trafficking (Finnegan, 2012). Finnegan muses that "no one believes that the government is calling the shots today in Mexico" (2012). This widespread corruption is what lends to the belief that Calderón's literally military War on Drugs has done little, if anything.

A concession must now be made. This thesis seeks to show that *the fact of* widespread corruption in Mexican government is a significant hamper to any Mexican (or U.S. via intervention) governmental action to limit the scope of the drug trade. It is not a judgmental tirade to criticize the moral standing of Mexican officials or common citizens. While not a freeing excuse, the corruption in Mexico stems from poverty. Compared to the United States' 15.1%, 51.3% of the Mexican population sits below the poverty line, and the Mexican per capita GDP is less than a third of the United States per capita GDP (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). American and Mexican analyses of the problem inevitably come from differing viewpoints. Rather than judge the problem, a holistic solution should merely accept the presence of pervasive Mexican corruption as fact and build from there.

Regardless, a new phase in the Mexican drug war begins as Felipe Calderón has been replaced by President Enrique Peña Nieto. He was sworn in on December 1, 2012. Naturally, Peña Nieto has said that the problem of violence will be his administration's number one priority (Kitfield, 2012). Many question what Peña Nieto's methods will include. His party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), held government control

through much of the twentieth century and was known to make deals with cartels as long as “they paid sufficiently large bribes and didn’t commit too much violence” (Kitfield, 2012). While Nieto promises to continue the struggle against drug violence fully (assumedly via sustained military action), critics wonder whether his approach will be less forceful and more diplomatic (Cave, Zabludovsky, & Archibold, 2012).

Nevertheless, Peña Nieto’s campaign victory suggests that Mexicans are eager for a change from the bloody struggle that has defined the last six years and cost 60,000 lives.

The political situation is turbulent, with corruption weakening government efforts and a regime change leaving many to wonder what will happen. The drug cartels, the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas, are at full strength and full war with one another. The next section will discuss U.S.-Mexican relations and the potential problems resulting from this background for both Mexico and the United States.

U.S.-Mexican Relations and Potential Problems for Both Nations

The Relationship between the United States and Mexico

It is important to analyze U.S.-Mexican relations because, if the U.S. is to have any influence in a solution to the problem in Mexico, they must first have an open, strong relationship with the government that then allows them to intervene. This is, for the most part, true of the U.S.-Mexico relationship, but there are certain factors that taint that relationship. There is a solid relationship, but it is strained by various viewpoints that each side has about the other.

In the best interests of both nations, the link between the United States and Mexico has remained healthy. Mexico benefits, if only by proximity, from the United States economically. Likewise, the United States benefits from Mexico’s economy and

work force. Peter Hakim explains “no foreign relationship is more important to the US than its bond with Mexico. With no other country is sustained cooperation—on trade, drugs, immigration, and many other issues—more central to US well being” (1999, p. 11). Both countries benefit, at the very least, in that the bordering nation is an ally.

However, the attention that academic scholars and investigative media have called to the drug and violence problem of Mexico has cast the Mexican people and government in a negative light. There is an indignant reaction to what becomes viewed as a criticism of Mexico itself. This places strain on the U.S.-Mexican relationship as Mexico begins to resent the U.S. for all its criticism.

As a reaction, Mexico will blame the United States for the problems they are experiencing. The money that enriches and powers the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas is, in the majority, United States dollars. Historically, it has always been the demand of United States citizens for drugs that has lined the pockets of Mexican drug traffickers (Stout, 2012). It is believed that much of the cash and the guns used in drug-related violence is supplied by Americans (Beith, 2012, p. 31). Thus, Mexico resents the U.S. for this indirect contribution to the drug and violence problem. Nevertheless, the border between Mexico and the United States remains “free-flowing” for the sake of ease and commerce.

The United States expresses frequent concern for what exactly comes over the Mexican border. Whether it be drugs, illegal aliens, terrorists, or trafficked humans, much comes over the border from Mexico that is not entirely regulated. Two opposing concerns arise from this dilemma. First, a completely closed border with Mexico would be impractical. Not only would it be difficult to enforce, requiring more staffing and funds, but it would also hurt both the United States and Mexico economically by shutting down

a major commerce route. Second, the U.S. wishes to have as little of the drugs and violence from Mexico to enter its borders as humanly possible. This desire is equally difficult to obtain; much of the violence and drug trafficking in Mexico is centered in border cities such as Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo. This love-hate tension of Mexican-US relations is not uniquely felt on the American side.

Mexico likewise both resents and appreciates United States intervention into Mexican affairs. On the one hand, the Mexican government benefits from U.S. financial aid towards the War on Drugs in Mexico. The Mérida Initiative issued by the United States in 2008 under former President George Bush established a program in which \$1.4 billion would be channeled into Mexico and Central America over three years (Shank, 2009, p. 16). The purpose of these funds is to train soldiers, give military equipment, and develop technologies to the intention of reducing drug trade and drug-related violence in the region (Shank, 2009, p. 16). President Barack Obama has inherited and continued the Mérida Initiative (Shank, 2008).

On the other hand, Mexico often sees heavy U.S. involvement in border security as a strong sign of distrust and suspicion from the U.S. towards Mexico, implying that Mexico cannot sufficiently tend to its problems of drug trafficking and violence (Chavez & Hoewe, 2010, p.184). The incident of Kiki Camarena was a significant strain on the U.S.-Mexican bond. DEA agent Camarena was murdered in Guadalajara in 1985 (Beith, 2012, p. 30). The United States sent many agents into Mexico on a retributive search for the killer (Beith, 2012). Mexico saw the incident as an infringement on their sovereignty and the blight remains. Thus, the U.S.-Mexican relationship is for the most part strong

but plagued by several tensions (Chavez & Hoewe, 2010) that, left unchecked, can grow into hindrances that cripple a necessary relationship.

Problems for the U.S. and Mexico

The sustained growth of Mexican cartel influence, violence, and trafficking activity is no doubt a problem. If the strength of the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas remains or grows, these problems will only grow worse. Two threats exist: first, the imminent impact on Mexico and those in the United States closest to the border (who are most directly impacted by proximity) and second, the potentially greater threat that can very possibly occur should the cartels grow in strength, numbers, and influence.

First, the most direct impact on Mexico is drug violence. As already discussed, some sixty thousand people have died in Mexico since Calderón began his war in 2006 (Kitfield, 2012). Even if Peña Nieto adopts a milder course of action against illegal cartels, the violence will not significantly diminish because cartel rivalry over money and trade routes will continue (Beith, 2012, p. 30). The Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas both inflict plenty of violence in their own right. The citizens are caught in the middle of a power play between rival cartels, and the body count only rises among cartel members, government forces, and ordinary citizens. The U.S. also fears that this violence, centralized in the border cities such as Ciudad Juárez, will seep into the United States (Shank, 2008, p. 18).

The violence leads to the degradation of entire communities. Kellner and Pipitone explicitly outline the fall of Aguascalientes from a state of relative peace and a sound judicial system to a state of terror, violence, and little government control (2010, p. 33-34). In early 2007, Los Zetas used their tried-and-true strategy to gain control over

Aguascalientes, and “by early 2009, Aguascalientes had become a terrifying place to live” (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 34). The kidnappings, ransom demands, rampant murders, public decapitations, and the increase of drug use all degrade whatever city or state Los Zetas invade. Aguascalientes is not the only victim; Ciudad Juárez is infamous for its violence and murder rates, as well as the mass graves found tragically often, compliments of Los Zetas. Naturally, this communal degradation is a crippling problem to Mexico. Its citizens unnecessarily live lives of fear, afraid to leave their homes for the violence that will inevitably affect them, their relatives, or someone they know (Finnegan, 2012).

If the Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas, and other less dominant drug cartels in Mexico continue to expand, a second less imminent but graver type of threat arises. This danger is the potential for the national government to not maintain full control of the land under its sovereignty. While cartel power grows unchecked, the Mexican government by default weakens as it does not address the situation. This is because cartels, once in control of a region, wield monetary and political power there (Beith, 2012).

Presently, the government is intact and fairly functional in Mexico. Corruption and ineffectiveness cripple it slightly, but there is sovereign control in an overall sense. The state is still fairly strong “because of its consolidated democracy, the strong financial system, and the strong welfare state” (Davis, 2010, p. 409). In a narrowing analysis of certain regions, police and soldiers hold the power in title while cartels hold it in act. Diane Davis uses the phrase “fragmented rather than failed sovereignty” to describe the political climate (2010, p. 410). In a splintering, Mexico has control of certain areas while its sovereignty is contested or lost (in actuality not title) in other areas.

With regard to the future, some scholars grimly predict that with the growth of drug cartels, Mexico is at-risk to become a failed state or a “narco-state” (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 37). In either scenario, the Sinaloa Cartel or Los Zetas (presumably whichever group won the power struggle) would come to control larger and larger swaths of land with little if any interference from the central Mexican government. Joel Kurtzman seriously considers the possibility that Mexico is regressing into a failed state similar perhaps to the situation in Pakistan (2009). Whether the government completely collapses or remains but without power would be irrelevant. Mexican authorities viciously disagree with these allegations, asserting that a comparison between Pakistan and Mexico is unfeasible (Davis, 2010). Anticipation of a failed Mexican state is no longer the prediction of extremist commentators but the U.S. government (Gregory, 2011, p. 244). That the possibility of a failed state is considered speaks to the severity of the situation in Mexico.

Still more serious is the fear that Mexico may develop into a “narco-state.” Barry McCaffrey argues that “It is not inconceivable that the violent, warring collection of criminal drug cartels could overwhelm the institution of the state and establish de facto control over broad regions of Mexico” (as cited in Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 37). In such a solemn scenario, it is more likely that the victorious cartel would splinter shortly after victory, plunging the nation into further chaos. In this most severe of predictions, the repercussions for U.S. security can be clearly seen.

The danger of a Mexican fragmented, failed, or narco-state is a potential future threat to the U.S.; the members of the U.S. government are aware of this problem. Recent pressure has “compelled Obama’s security and foreign policy aides to consider Mexico’s

‘widening narco-insurgency’ as urgently as the economy and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan” (Shank, 2009, p. 18). Also, Governor Perry of Texas has requested that President Obama send 1,000 troops to the U.S.-Mexican border as a deterrence to drug violence coming over the border (Shank, 2009). Were the state of Mexico to fail, the most pressing threat to U.S. security would be the seepage of violence, drugs, and cartel activity into the United States.

Another threat to the U.S. in the scenario of a failed Mexican state is the presence of narco-terrorism. Narco-terrorism is a theory in criminal justice explaining the relationship between the drug trade and terrorist groups. Terrorist groups often rely on the sale of illicit drugs to supply their acts of terrorism; drug cartels (e.g. Los Zetas) often engage in acts of a terrorist nature to establish dominance in an area or otherwise further their agenda (White, 2009). The United States has begun to see ties between Middle Eastern terrorism and Los Zetas. Jordy Yager reports that “U.S. intelligence and security officials have been monitoring the ties of the major drug cartels operating in Mexico, such as the Los Zetas cartel, for possible connections to Al Qaeda or Al Qaeda affiliates” (2011). Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Florida congresswoman, asserts “it seems that our sworn enemy Iran sees a potential kindred spirit in the drug cartels in Mexico” (Beith, 2012, p. 30). With ties between Mexican drug cartels and foreign terrorist groups, it is no stretch to think that a failed Mexican state could become a training ground for terrorists aimed at the United States. This possibility is both worrisome to and being investigated by the U.S. (Gregory, 2011, p. 245). Terrorists training in Mexico to attack the U.S. would become an important priority for homeland security measures should Mexico become a failed state.

Also, a failed Mexican state would become a hostile neighbor to the United States where now sits an amiable one. The one change from a unified Mexico as an ally to a chaotic fragmented Mexico as a hostile next-door security threat would necessitate a change in U.S. foreign policy. Thus, the drug trade with all its trafficking and related violence that plagues Mexico is also a concern to the United States. To ignore the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas because they are located in another country would be foolish. The next section will discuss various potential solutions or preventative measures that can remedy or mitigate this problem.

Preventative Measures

Both the United States and Mexican governments need to develop solutions to the drug problem in Mexico (not to mention the U.S. drug problem). This, however, is easier said than done. After 30 years of struggling against drug organizations' activities, the U.S. and Mexico often have very little to show for their respective "wars." The struggle against drugs is an interminable struggle. A sense of impossibility can become pervasive. Beith writes on this: "Most Mexican officials concede that it will be impossible to eradicate the drug problem entirely. Their best hope is to make Mexico so difficult for drug traffickers to navigate that they are forced to go elsewhere" (2012, p. 31). While implementing solutions, it is important that neither nation's government allow impositions on the personal rights of its citizens in the name of the common good. The militaristic approach that Cave, Zabludovsky, and Archibold (2012) predict Peña Nieto will continue to implement against drug cartels is not effective and must be abandoned for other possible solutions. The rest of this section will discuss various proposed

measures to fight the drug problem, analyzing benefits and disadvantages. At the end, a blended approach will be suggested.

One of the best proposed solutions to both the drug problem of Mexico and the United States is demand reduction. This is also the hardest to implement. United States demand drives drug traffickers in the U.S. and in Mexico. Without that demand, drug traffickers would seek other more lucrative businesses and drug-related violence would diminish. Recio argues that the majority of drugs that traffickers pass through Mexico are not intended for Mexican clientele, but U.S. citizens who will pay more (2002). This reduction has to occur in the heaviest users of drugs. Kleiman argues that 80 percent of drugs are consumed by the minority of heaviest users and thus believes that “reducing the demand for cannabis or the demand for cocaine among casual cocaine users cannot reduce the northbound flow of drugs” (2011, p. 92). Affecting demand reduction in this U.S. clientele would cause the drug trade to diminish. However, government can only judge its citizens’ actions, not their thoughts. Hypothetically, a government could make the punishment harsher and harsher for drug-related activity, and if the internal demand of the individual remains, that person will still engage in drug-related activity. Thus, pure demand reduction is an internal, moral initiative, not a government one. The solution touching upon demand reduction which the government can impact is viewing drug use as a public health issue.

Making drug consumption a public health issue, not a criminal issue, means that the government must focus more on drug treatment and prevention than drug arrests and incarceration (Shank, 2008, p. 18). It is important to note that this solution is most applicable to *users* of drugs, not dealers or traffickers. The distinction is important,

because even under a public health approach, the secondary effects of drug use—violence, theft, and other crimes—must still be treated strictly criminally. It is the *using* of drugs that is viewed less criminally.

Used effectively, this solution has the ability to gradually reduce drug use across the general population. While not an immediate fix, it can be a successful measure. Shank believes that it has become the inclination of the present U.S. administration to “[stem] demand for illegal narcotics through prevention and treatment” (2009, p. 18). It is by citing the drug problem as a public hazard to the nation as a whole that the federal government has received authority to intervene. Richard Gil Kerlikowske, the present director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (the “drug czar”), believes that drug use is better treated as a public health issue than a criminal issue (Beith, 2012, p. 31). Treating drug use as a public health issue is similar to rehabilitation theory. However, the U.S. government, state or federal, often cannot effectively implement rehabilitation in corrections. Thus, making drug use a health issue may be difficult to implement. This does not mean the public health route is a solution best left alone.

Another suggested measure to curb Mexican cartels is labeling the cartels as terrorist groups in U.S. policy. As argued above, these cartels (especially Los Zetas) pose a credible narco-terrorist threat, both through their own actions and through their connections with the Middle East. Thus, it is credible to officially label them as terrorists in policy. Almost immediately, this change in U.S. policy would allow and drive the government to become more involved in Mexico’s War on Drugs (Beith, 2012). This method is only viable for political reasons. The War on Terrorism has higher priority in the present-day administration than Mexican cartel drug trafficking and violence. Thus,

making cartels terrorist groups would bring the problem to a higher priority level instantly. However, as discussed earlier, the increase of United States involvement in Mexican affairs might only engender resentment within the Mexican administration. Certain U.S. changes in policy, such as directing more funds to Mexico via the Mérida Initiative, would be less intrusive than direct action. Politics is a necessary vehicle of legislative or policy change, but to use this solution is to toe a thin line between involvement and letting Mexico gradually solve their problems.

Another potential solution to the drug problems of Mexico that is suggested in academic and liberal circles is decriminalization. Decriminalization of drugs, particularly the “lesser” ones such as marijuana, is proposed as a solution that would increase tax funds, reduce drug-related violence, and generally augment the community. According to Stout, legalization² has been considered by Mexico in the past, but was rejected after strong protest from the Roman Catholic Church (2012). Stout argues that “legalization would re-channel importation and sales and make addiction, overdoses, and side effects a public health problem instead of strictly a law-enforcement concern” (2012, p. 44). The advantage of increased tax profits for the state is a core argument of many arguments for legalization. In certain cases, scholars support legalization but fail to enumerate convincing reasons of why it would solve the drug problem. Beith seems to endorse legalization, but his article failed to enumerate any reasons as to why this was the case (2012). Decriminalization would bring in tax revenue, and a corresponding shift in policy towards a public health view would be effective, but drug-related violence would continue to be a problem. While it is plausible to think that drug traffickers would

² Legalization technically differs from decriminalization in that the former in essence approves the activity while the latter merely reduces it from a criminal status.

legitimize for the sake of ease of business, there is also the possibility that these traffickers will continue to work in the black market merely to avoid taxation, thus not lessening the violence whatsoever. Stout concedes that while legalization would benefit the state financially, drug-related violence would continue to be a problem afterwards (2012). A case in which decriminalization would be effective is if the federal code decriminalized drug use. Leaving the legislation and enforcement of drug laws to state and local authorities, such a model would be more constitutional³ and could tailor itself to the needs of varying communities. Overall, decriminalization is proposed by many but with few concrete answers, particularly to the question of drug-related violence. From the standpoint of Christian morality, decriminalization of drug use is not justified if drug-related violence remains prevalent or even increases.

In Mexico, a proposed solution to drug cartel growth and violence is to diminish the amount of corruption in the Mexican government. Corruption allows cartels to operate without fear of reprisal, and corrupted police do not enforce the law, making it harder to fight cartel forces. Thus, by limiting corruption, soldiers and police would more effectively fight against cartel troops, and traffickers would have to work harder to find illicit methods of transporting their products. Kellner and Pipitone compare Mexico to Columbia and argue that the Mexican government must utilize a set of steps similar to those enacted in Columbia that have effectively lowered cartel activity and violence (2010, p. 36). There are two changes that, effected quickly, can have rapid impact on the War on Drugs in Mexico. First, the system should allow for the removal of government

³ This statement assumes a strict interpretation of the Constitution and critiques the excessively broad interpretation of the Commerce Clause that has led to today's large federal government. The regulation of use and sale of drugs, not strictly enumerated within the Constitution, is thus left to the states via the Tenth Amendment.

workers suspected of corruption without the typical bureaucratic process that dismissing involves, and second, the funds must be allocated to the better training of and better salary to government personnel, particularly those in the enforcement branch (Kellner & Pipitone, 2010, p. 36). By allowing quicker dismissal of employees (perhaps a temporary measure), corruption can quickly be rooted out of the Mexican ranks. Better training and better pay, while costly, would ensure that government workers will be more effective and less tempted by the “narco” money offered in bribes. The difficulty lies in knowing who to trust with the dismissal process and insuring that the money for better pay and training ends up reaching its intended goal. This solution does assume finding trustworthy individuals to implement these policies, and there lies the difficulty (though not impossibility). Overall, reducing corruption in Mexico would be costly and difficult to implement at the inception, but the measure would be highly effective long-term.

A blended solution to the Mexican drug cartel problem would be a plan consisting of elements from multiple proposed measures. First, drug use should be viewed more as a public health issue and less as a criminal issue in need of enforcement. This, in implementation, would mean less drug use incarcerations and more options for rehabilitation offered to drug users or addicts who want help for their condition. Implemented correctly, this measure would reduce drug use and has to potential to counter recidivism through proper rehabilitation of addicts. This measure must be carried out in the United States, where majority of the users of Mexican drugs reside. Second, the U.S. should label the major drug cartels, particular the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas, as terrorist groups. The main intent of such a measure would be to insure more U.S. focus on the problem. The U.S. should begin with more financial aid to Mexico where

necessary. Direct United States involvement in Mexican affairs through agencies such as the DEA should be avoided as they bring tension to U.S.-Mexican relations. Direct involvement must remain a last resort should the situation in Mexico degenerate in to a failed or narco-state. Third, Mexican corruption must be fought and eventually reduced by the Mexican government themselves. Eliminating corruption requires not only the aid of trustworthy individuals high in government, but also a system whereby those individuals are accountable to one another and exhibit transparency in their actions and methods. Without this crucial last step, any measures to fight drug activity would inevitably fail in their implementation as they have in the past.

Conclusion

This article has sought to call attention to a situation not widely recognized in the United States. With roots in the early 1900s, certain organizations in Mexico have evolved from smugglers of alcohol to traffickers of drugs and then to full-fledged cartels with the manpower to ensure that deliveries are successful and enforcement strikes fear in the hearts of errant cartel members and meddling citizens. The two main cartels of Mexico, El Cartel de Sinaloa and Los Zetas (growing out of El Cartel del Golfo) dominate the northwestern and northeastern regions of Mexico, respectively, and have begun to clash in struggles over territory, product, and control. Problems lurk for both Mexico and the United States as violence from rival cartels effects citizens caught in the crossfire. Citizens are even targeted in the terror campaigns of Los Zetas. Were the cartels to continue to grow exponentially, the United States should be aware of the threat of a fragmented, narco-, or failed Mexican state. The U.S. and Mexico must overcome tense relations marred by previous blunders and implement a strategy plan that addresses

Mexican corruption and changes the view of drug use from a criminal issue to an issue of public health.

Christian ethics, while not emphasized in this paper, also play a vital part in the dynamics of drug activity. The Mexican drug trade flourishes from demand that American citizens show. From casual users to drug addicts, the immoral choices of individuals to partake in drugs indirectly drive the violence of drug cartels in Mexico. Every individual is called to live with moral integrity, particularly those in the field of criminal justice, and that moral integrity must include avoiding any activity that would further violence and death in this world.

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